

Counter Memorial Project at Seattle Central College
Tracy Lai, History Faculty
NEH Summer Institute: Native Americans and the West: A Case Study of the
Columbia Plateau, June 17 – July 1, 2018

Seattle Central College is located on Coast Salish lands, including that of the Duwamish peoples who continue to fight for federal recognition.

Students in the Pacific Northwest history course (HIST 214) will collaborate among themselves and in consultation with Duwamish leaders to create a counter memorial at Seattle Central that interrogates the college's role and responsibilities in teaching American Indian studies (the history of indigenous peoples of this region, the violence and imposition of settler colonialism, the survivance of indigenous communities including the Duwamish struggle for federal recognition), supporting the success of Native American students and actively recruiting and supporting Native American staff, faculty and administration.

James E. Young describes counter memorials as, “memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premise of the monument” (“Memory and Counter-Memory,” *Harvard Design Magazine*, No. 9). While Young's analysis focuses on counter memorials in the context of the Holocaust of World War II, the concept also applies to the genocide of indigenous peoples – in this case, North America.

Amy Lonetree's *Decolonizing Museums* critiques the representations of Native Americans in both tribal and non-tribal settings. The implications for decolonizing historical studies and other memory work throughout educational institutions are profound and challenges us to be thoroughly transformative.

The Counter Memorial project focuses on decolonizing the College's institutional role and how students understand the conquest and occupation of the Pacific Northwest. This 6-week project (during an 11-week quarter) will explore the following themes:

- Coast Salish and Columbia Plateau Native worlds
- Settler colonialism
- Education (Boarding Schools, Seattle Central as part of higher education, indigenous language revitalization)
- Survivance (“we are still here”)

Students are encouraged to seek a variety of mediums (i.e. visual, audio, experiential) to create their counter memorial. The medium(s) should be culturally appropriate and within the skills range of the group members (for example, do not choose an artistic medium that the group cannot execute or is prohibitively expensive). Please keep in

mind safety standards of the college (e.g. fire, weapons). Students are encouraged to consider using found objects as part of their installations.

The completed Counter Memorial Project will include:

- Introduction and statement of purpose (300 words maximum)
- Directly address at least two of the themes listed above
- Connect the project to HIST 214 as a counter memorial

Presentation times and public viewings to be scheduled.

Supporting Materials:

Promised Land (2016) documentary on the Duwamish and Chinook in their struggles to restore treaty rights.

[The Confluence Project](#) – Maya Lin’s public art collaboration with tribes and communities along 400 miles of the Columbia

Cutler, Donald L., “*Hang Them All*” – *George Wright and the Plateau Indian War*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016.

Harjo, Suzan Shown, ed. *Nation to Nation*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2014. (See “Rights Guaranteed by Solemn Treaties”).

Harmon, Alexandra, ed. *The Power of Promises*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2008.

Lonetree, Amy. *Decolonizing Museums, Representing Native America in Native and Tribal Museums*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2012.

Woody, Elizabeth. *Seven Hands Seven Hearts*. Portland, OR: Eighth Mountain Press, 1994